



CAN PRAYER
BE ANSWERED?

MARY
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CAN PRAYER BE ANSWERED?

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CAN PRAYER BE ANSWERED?

M A R Y
A U S T I N



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

FOR many years I thought I might some day write a book on the method and philosophy of prayer. For thirty-five years I have experimented in it freely, kept notes, and supposed that I had learned enough about it to make a substantial contribution. What I discover at the end of that time is that I am still far from the end of discoveries about it. As an excuse for these spare notes upon the subject, I offer that the art of prayer has dropped out of general practice, and that, at a time when, if ever, we need it, it may be possible to bring it back into the psychology of our era.



.I.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRAYER

I

TINNEMAHA, MEDICINE MAN

I WAS brought up in an atmosphere of middle-western Methodism, where prayer was largely an emotional exercise of greater or lesser intensity. Then I came to a crisis in my life where supernatural help was required but could not be commanded by the emotional method. The only other resort I had was to the Paiute Indians, who practiced long-established methods of prayer which I had reason to believe were, in personal emergencies, available. It was Tinnemaha, the medicine man, who explained to me what all my study of aboriginal methods has confirmed—that Indians do not pray to a god but to a principle existing in all created life, accessible to man, responsive to him, workable. It went, for Tinnemaha, by the

name of The Friend of the Soul of Man—something alive and kindly. By prayer you laid hold on it and if you prayed aright you got what you asked. There were various ways of reaching this Friend, and some people were more successful at it than others. A personal incident brought to my mind that the medicine man from Fish Lake was particularly successful. It happened that my *mahala* (servant woman) had on her lung an abscess of which she was like to die. I had taken her to my white doctor, who said that she would die in a few days when the abscess grew so large that it pressed upon her heart. She herself had been to Tinne-maha, who had failed to relieve her, but the *mahala* herself was certain that if she could only get the medicine man from Fish Lake. . . . I couldn't afford it but I agreed to pay for him if the Indians would fetch him and take him home.

He came at nightfall, when she was so far gone that she could no longer talk. He went over her body with a gentle tapping which he left off as he neared the location of the abscess. Then he had her

warmly wrapped, a fire near her feet, and began the treatment by singing and dancing. He kept time with a gourd rattle, and was accompanied by several older Indians. After an hour or two the *mahala's* moaning fell off, and she seemed to sleep. For another hour the monotonous chant went on; then the medicine man himself dropped into a light, trancelike slumber of twenty minutes or so, from which he roused to say that he had met the Friend and felt sure that another hour or two of treatment would effect a cure. So it went on, until the medicine man stretched himself beside her in sleep, and I watched, creeping up occasionally to feel that she was still warm. About daylight the *mahala* waked, coughed, threw off a quantity of bloody sputum, and some time later sat up and demanded something to eat.

Before he left I had as much as possible of his method from the medicine man. He said you didn't get help from the Friend simply by asking; you had first to get to Him, or It. (He called it Him but explained that it was not a person.) You had

to make a veritable motion of your own soul, "Here." He moved his hand over the region of his solar plexus. When you had climbed up to the Friend by rhythmic motions and noises you laid hands on Him, and the thing you wanted happened. All I have ever learned since from Indians of their method of prayer does not go much beyond that.

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

PRAYER, to the aboriginal, is an explicit motion of the inner self which puts you in touch with the living principle which controls the existing emergency, whether it be of sickness or the need of rain to make crops grow. All primitive prayer methods apparently are built on some such intuitive apprehension of mind-stuff diffused throughout creation and accessible to man's mind. This is the basis of all activities called religious, and it is no longer held unscientific to insist that this general human assumption has casual efficiency. The great psychologist, William McDougall, maintains that the sciences afford positive support to such fundamental affirmations of religion. And there are plainly marked traces of the belief in such fundamentals pervading the created universe in all the great religions that have contributed to civilization. It was

the scientific side of my mind that led to the ready acceptance of aboriginal prayer systems which meant more than mere emotional appeal and depended for their efficacy upon explicit activities of the individual mind. Even the most primitive tribes seem to have made that discovery, and to have found that the necessary motions for successful prayer are more easily made by some minds than others. The natural differences in individual capacity for successful prayer plainly indicated that the best methods, if not native, might at least be acquired.

I set out then, to learn the Indian method. What I discovered first was that the value of sustained rhythmic movements and noises, so much used by the Indians, lay in their power to break the tension of immediate circumstances and their hold on the attention. I experimented with the drum, the piano, and the dance. What I learned was that the drum was the most efficacious because one can play it and dance at the same time, as one cannot with any other instrument.

Dancing, which is so important to primitive prayer, is no more than a completely integrated rhythmic movement, persisted in until all the rhythms of the physical being are gathered together in it, to the exclusion of all other bodily sensations. The step and motion which accomplishes this with the greatest ease is the one preferred, and should be persisted in until all other sensation is absorbed by it. It is most efficacious when persisted in to the point of ecstasy.

I experimented with symbolic gesture and dress and found that their function was suggestive—especially the ritualistic act—enabling the petitioner to get into the creative principle that underlies successful prayer in the same way that a scientific experiment enables the experimenter to get inside the substance that is the object of research. By going through the constructive gestures of an act you get closer to the causative efficiency of that act, nearer to making it take place.

By experimenting in the symbolic use of smoke I learned the immensely suggestive power it has

in Indian ritual. It is well known that smoke played an important part in all Indian ceremonies but probably not understood that it has become popular through its association with meditative affective states of mind. Meditation is the first of a series of religiously affective states of mind, and anything that cuts you off from habitual mental attitudes of mind and lets you go free toward prayer, meditation is indispensable to the opening movement of prayer. Singing is good, rhythmic movements, smoking, repetition of somnolent phrases, anything that creates an isolation around the inner sense can be helpfully used. Ritual acts of a quieting sort which your own experience leads you to can be used to begin an affective session of prayer. I have not experimented much in ritual affective dress but have studied it enough to understand the early association of drama and religion and to appreciate the help that the religious orders get from their ritual of dress.

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

IN ALL this I had some help, probably from the necessity my vocation as a writer forced upon me—of being able to practice varying attitudes of mind and modes of thought. I found the two practices of prayer and creative writing worked together helpfully, but my earliest use of suggestion was to break the hold on my attention of the immediate present. All modes of suggestion are helpful in securing the state of mind most necessary to making the prayer gesture successfully—the state of detachment. Everybody lives more or less in a coil of immediate claims upon attention which must be shuffled off before the attention can be affectively fixed on the creative principle which it is designed to use as a basis of prayer. But to learn about the necessity and method of detachment I had to have help from nearer my own period, and

this I got by going to Italy on an errand which I shall explain later.

Before setting out for Italy I had become fairly expert in making the Indian prayer gesture, which consists in setting up in your inner self a motion carefully tuned and timed with the motion of the universe in the field in which you hope to be affective: the field of health, or success in any chosen activity, or dominance over any material complex. Perhaps I came to this capacity rather more easily than most because I had not got myself established in any artificial modes of prayer, but was able to move freely in any direction suggested by the particular prayerful emergency in which I found myself, and because I was always confronted by the necessity, the habit, my writing life imposed, of being able to adjust myself to any fruitful activity. I always dropped any method which did not become shortly productive. So I fell quickly into the Indian method—and that may have been, though I did not at that period realize it, because I have Indian blood—a little, not too far back. And then

I had an experience at playing poker which carried me further.

Being brought up a Methodist meant, of course, that not only had I a moral prejudice against all card games, but that I was genuinely bored by all forms of them. And I was too little familiar with them to have discovered what most people are too familiar with them to have noticed, that poker in particular is played with the deepest level of what is called the card sense, with the aptitudes which lie almost all together in the subconscious, that is to say, with the levels in which the prayer sense is most easily established. I have already told elsewhere¹ how deeply I felt myself indebted to Dr. Woodin, the local physician, who had been a distinguished New York diagnostician driven desertward by tuberculosis, and become my dear and intimate friend. About this time he had suffered a severe carriage accident which lamed him for months, so that those of us who loved him had to devote much time to his entertainment with poker,

¹ *Earth Horizon*, Houghton Mifflin Co.

his favorite card game. And in learning to do my part I had discovered not only the location of the card sense, near the prayer sense, but pronounced activities that so resembled the activities uncovered to me by my experiments in Indian prayer. They lay not far beyond the levels of deliberate intellectual consciousness and could be deliberately set in motion, or aroused in response to the corresponding activity going on in the mind of another, precisely as the activities which make toward personal health and prosperity arose and engaged those which stirred in the social centers of the tribe. Sitting under the linden tree on the Doctor's untidy lawn with two or three old cronies of his I met and struggled with these half submerged activities of their minds, coördinated with them, dominated or surrendered, and began to understand that it was so prayer worked under the surface of all mind toward an instinctive end. The prayer impulse was not impulse merely but something that worked at the instigation of other working, something that could not always refuse the

invitation to work, with or against the centers of other minds, and it was the certainty that its activities proceeded out of several centers of origination that set up in me the conviction that one had no manner of right to engage other minds without their consent and complete knowledge, in the web of your own praying. It might happen so easily, if yours were the stronger impulse, if you understood the mechanism better, that another mind might be dragged along with yours, to the misdirection of its native purposes. That we are so played upon and perverted by the subconscious activities of other minds, there seems no manner of doubt, so that I came back to the habits of tribal prayer with a completer understanding of the necessity back of its prayer practices, of completely integrated ideation. I was able to understand that the modern failure of group or social prayer is owing to the want of such integration; that we pray our prayers as a game, each to win against the other, rather than for a perfected accomplishment.

That's why you will notice that all the group

enterprises I engage in are those that go forward, Indian Arts, Spanish Colonial Arts, Folk Arts generally, why even at this distance I watch, keep in touch, put my oar in freely where these things go on, and am able more or less to prophesy truly about them, because I am able to keep on praying with them; why I keep on trying to explain myself in these particulars, knowing as I do that it is only by completely integrating the ideas behind them that they can be kept moving.

And that was the second thing I learned in the wilderness about prayer, sitting with Dr. Woodin and a few "old Timers" in The Land of Little Rain, dealing poker—I wonder if any of them are left there—and realizing it as a next normal activity on the way of prayer. It was this that prepared me for what I came upon in Italy, the use and employment of the Saints, with whom I came to play a sublimated form of poker, profoundly, completely integrated.

I suppose no one who goes to Italy does much the first few weeks but look at churches, and there

I was immediately struck by the immense importance of prayer in the early history of the Catholic Church. I was well enough read in early Mediterranean history to see promptly how it overlapped with Greek and Roman influences and I was able by my recently acquired knowledge of primitive prayer, developing by the addition of personalities to abstract properties of mind, to see how it all welded together as a process of human evolution. I began at once tracing the Christian method out of its various Mediterranean stems, and no sooner had I read what the early Christian saints had left on the subject than I found myself back where I had begun with the Indians—at prayer as an explicit gesture of the mind. Among the saints as among the savages, prayer was not so much a thing asked as a thing done—a linking of the individual mind with supernal sources of power. There was the same use of ritual for breaking the tension of immediate things, increased as that tension increased with multiplication of the ways in which civilization laid hold on the minds of men: the

same use of posture and color and dress and similar use of symbols—in wine and bread, in incense smoke and candle flame. But the saints had pushed on further, made more explicit gestures. They had in fact climbed so far beyond the psychology of their time that the vocabulary of their time furnished no more words by which their gestures could be explained, which is probably why by the middle of the sixteenth century, prayer methods had reached a complexity which I have not been able to catch up with absolutely. The prevalence of the monastic idea had by this time removed the fixation of prayer from the immediate daily needs of Christian living to what it will do for us hereafter, so that the average person lost interest in it as an adventure.

However, it was as an adventure that I still pursued it, with much help from various notable Catholics whom I met, and with access to the Library of the Vatican and the Bibliothèque Nationale. I picked up the Greek and Roman methods and traced them under their gradual shift to the

Christian approach. It was easy to trace through it all the perpetual search among the many influences man felt playing on his destiny, for the right name, the explicit force, the way in which the saints of Christianity were let into the places of the lesser gods of the heathen hierarchies. The Christian saint was a perfectly logical deduction from the Early Christian conviction of survival which made its way along with Christian belief into Mediterranean thought. I had found the beginning of that practice among the Pueblos, who had made a practice of burying people noted for their sanctity in their house walls, so that it was easy to see how the necessity of proving and demonstrating the survival of special miraculous powers had become a serious responsibility of the Church. But it was also just as plain that the legends of the earlier saints had never been anything but legends evolved out of the human need to attach personality to the felt responsiveness to prayer. The earliest saints had never had any more real existence than had the Rainbow Boy of the Navajo or the Thunder-bird, with

clashing feathers of obsidian, of the Pueblo. So clearly were they built out of man's eager search for validity among the supernormal powers, that I found at Rome even an altar to St. Expedite, the Holy Hurry-up, who could be appealed to in emergencies.

I was taken to St. Expedite's altar by an American woman who had spent years in Rome, developing a tender humorous attitude toward Saints in general, and I recall her explaining the name to me as having arisen out of the eagerness of the Sisters—it was at a conventual house we found him, as I recall rather far out on the City outskirts,—who had written in such eagerness to their favorite prelate, that they might be provided with a veridical Saint, that he had sent it them, marked Expedite, for hastening, so that they supposed that to have been the enclosed Saint's name—and I remember discussing it with the distinguished Prelate who had lent himself to my instruction. He said, I remember, that he thought it better for the Sisters to have a Saint, by any name, to lean upon than

for them to grow fussily meticulous about his particular name, and I agreed with him, remembering how the Indians had named the operative forces behind the fruitful storm, Thunder Bird and Rainbow Boy, although I suppose such naming is not strictly orthodox.

From religion to religion it wasn't the identity of the power that counted. What the ancestors had been doing was

Calling on Zeus by the names of Victory

and no matter what name was called, something always answered.

A QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENT

WELL, I wasn't afraid by this time to walk with reverent feet in any trail where men had reverently walked before me. I found by direct experiment that I could pray successfully to Mary when I wanted mothering or to St. Joseph when in need of husbandly care and protection. Not that I ever believed that surviving personalities who had once lived under these names responded to my prayers but rather that mothering and husbanding are such fundamental, normal, human activities that the aptitude for them must run through the whole fabric of humanity—accessible and (if there is anything at all to the theory of prayer) well within the reach of prayerful evocation. The whole texture of what we call our spiritual life must be made up largely of these dispositions, so that the individual existence is capable of being amplified and

extended by the use of this deeply practiced experience of the stuff of human life. I am still more convinced that it is the activating principle in nature that does the work of saints, rather than surviving personalities. But I know also that the nearer you come to calling this principle by an explicit name, the better it works, and that by endowing it with personality it takes on warmth and intimacy. It is true that I never practiced getting help for things lost from St. Anthony of Padua nor went the length of standing the saint on his head or relegating him for a few days to the family rubbish heap until he became more attentive, as I have heard that Italian peasants do; but I did, as I shall describe further on, get help from St. Francis of Assisi and various others of the notable realities among saintships when these had left a clear trail to their sources.

Also something else happened to me which I always attach to my intense preoccupation with prayer methods at that time. For I had really gone to Italy expecting to die there. Some six or eight

months before going I had suffered painful symptoms which had finally been diagnosed as cancer of the breast, an affliction which might be delayed by an operation but which was most likely to end in an extremely painful death. And I, having been more or less ill most of my life, decided to make no fight, to go when my time came—but not before I had seen what I hated to miss most of this earth, the great art of the world. So with my arm in a sling and my breath drawn tight against pain I set out for Italy. Some five months later I met in Venice friends I had not seen since my arrival. They commented on the fact that I was not wearing my sling. And when I stopped to think about it I realized that I did not know when I had left it off. Feeling cautiously for the place where the pain used to be I realized that, somewhere in the business of achieving complete detachment for the furtherance of my prayer project, I had left my ailment behind me.

Notwithstanding that I had never shaped a petition to that end, I was so convinced of the rele-

vance of these two phenomena that I have made a practice since, in the many serious illnesses that have overtaken me, of escaping them not by direct prayer but simply by occupying myself profoundly with the gestures of prayer. I look over my various projects until I discover one which seems to require the use of prayer and get busy about it, in which process I escape the illness. But it was this experience which taught me the necessity of detachment as a preliminary to successful prayer. To have a prayer come through you must not care too much or too personally about it, must as completely as possible separate yourself from all emotion about it. Not that prayer accompanied by emotion won't come through, but that it will come stormily, involved in other emotions that obscure and distort its reactions. After this had happened to me two or three times, I recalled that my friends, the Indians, had always avoided emotion in prayer, and that in the books of the saints it was so advised.

In the writings of the saints I found two explicit methods, one of which consisted in thinking your-

self into the picture of the answered prayer, seeing yourself in it, and living in that conviction; while the other method centered in realizing the essential property of the answer and through that realization entering into possession. The first of these methods is Roman, and the second, Greek. One recalls that the Roman placed a candle and a wreath on his dung heap, inviting the spirit of fertilization resident in dung heaps to act upon his field; while the Greek prayed with music and libations to a spirit of burgeoning growth. So doing, the Greeks became poets and philosophers, and the Romans mighty materialists; so that it seems largely a matter of temperament which method you choose. The indispensable process of all methods appears to be a clear realization of the effect that is desired.

That is why Indians worked steadily toward the personalization of the forces believed to be working for them; and the Christians ended with the complete personalization in saints of the end desired; and why, perhaps, when the whole field of human endeavor had been personalized the Chris-

tian adventure of prayer began to decline. It may be that before we get a return to the medieval fervors of prayer we will have to get a clearer perception of what it is that works in answer to the sustained process of desire called prayer. But we can go a little further with the saints before we are plump upon the necessity of finding something to take their places.



.II.

INNER HARMONY AND COMMUNION

II

SYMBOLS AND SAINTS

BY this time, before I had done with aboriginal prayer, I had realized that all the shapes of personality that came into being with it, Tirrawa, Wokonda, Thunder-Bird, People of the Middle Heaven, had grown out of the recognition of the Power at work in it, as having an explicit existence, shape and identity. Zeus, Brahama, Jehovah, whatever you called it, the nearer you came to realizing it as possessed of such shape and identity, the greater your ability to use it. That the first supernormal figures shaping themselves on the horizon of Prayer were purely mythical there is no doubt. It is evident that many of them grew into concepts of power through being recognized as constructive threads of activity constituting the

spiritual make-up of the Universe. There *is* a group of such primary activities pervading the region of the Middle Heaven which came eventually to be recognized as gods of the weather, of eventualities of growth, of love and fertility. This was so plain to me that I had no difficulty in adopting for evocative use such half, or even wholly mythical figures as the Shalako, the Thunder-Bird, Awanyu, Angels, Archangels, The Mother of God, as symbolic items useful in the processes of prayer. After being worked upon by the imagination of men, the figures so evoked saved time and effort in directing the motions of man's inner self in the evocative processes by which the answer to prayer is brought about. Having discovered the aid thus furnished to accomplishment in prayer, and having already found in such normal and universal aptitudes as were uncovered for me in the process of poker playing, the activities of prayer ready to go on of their own motion, I was prepared for the adoptive use of saints, such as I found prevailing throughout Italy.

I was the more willing to avail myself of the use of the saints because by this time I was convinced that the things I wished most to accomplish required money that I wouldn't be able to accumulate out of the life work I had chosen. Such things as establishing the values of Indian Art as appreciable items of American culture, saving the aptitudes for handcraft such as constituted the contribution of the Spanish Colonials to the totality of Southwestern Art, or the whole contribution of American Folk Art wherever found, couldn't be managed on the income I could expect to achieve by the sort of writing I preferred to do. And I always knew enough not to pray for the success of any venture to the laws of which I do not mean to conform. In accounting for my success in undertakings to which my normal income was not adequate, I have to credit myself with the good sense to ask for income not allowed for in my normal income capacity, a proviso which I think can be counted on to work not only in general, but in the particulars to which an individual life is subject.

I have described prayer as a gesture of the mind, an explicit gesture applicable to a particular use, some of which call for long continued discipline, indispensable to the use required.

The first of these gestures is known to the saints as Recollection, which is defined in the dictionary as "reflexively to compose one's self." The first part of it is an act of choice, separating out of all the items that might claim your attention in that direction, those that are fundamental to the gesture to be made and the purpose in hand. You call upon yourself for the qualities you may require, and the experiences from which you will need to draw, and banish everything likely to be distracting. Next you meditate. You sit quietly and apart, all the stray tags and streamers of your mind tucked in, all your energies folded and at hand. Then you run through your mind the problem which has inspired your need of prayer; you look it over intelligently, brushing aside gently all intrusive matter, not thrusting and clamping down on the preferred aspects, but holding it easily with the flow of breath,

falling away from it and coming back untiringly to the subject of meditation. The final efficacy of your prayer will depend on the initial success of your meditation and your elimination from it of all extraneous matter.

This should lead directly to the next stage, which is of complete detachment. This is most difficult to accomplish; it consists in making the mind a blank, so far as thought and imagery are concerned, like the clean round on the screen before the film is run, and can seldom be maintained more than a few minutes. Once it is achieved, however, images begin to rise from the lower levels of consciousness and move lightly across the cleared space. Do not try to hold them, merely note and welcome them as they rise; those that are important and suggestive will return again and again. With me, I make this motion the last thing at night, and the images tend to return early in the morning, when sleep begins to break, with all their implications fulfilled. Their value and significance is in the notice they give that the deeper levels of the mind

are engaged, and that connection has been made with the affective forces, on which you have to depend for the answer to your prayer.

After a few minutes of this—I never give more than fifteen or twenty minutes to the whole exercise, unless I am breaking ground for a new meditation—begins the formal prayer petition. I find it better to have the petition formalized in two or three sentences that can be run off rapidly as prayers are recited in the Catholic Church, leaving no chink by which extraneous thoughts can intrude, and after three or four repetitions pass to informal prayer in which any points for which particular attention is required may be developed, and close with an acknowledgment of thanks to whatever helpful power has been addressed. Acknowledgments of this nature are helpful and important, probably because they constitute an affirmation of faith. One recalls that Jesus, whose instruction in the process is the most modern and scholarly we have, followed this practice. The whole philosophy of Christian prayer is that there

is something in the universe which is responsive to the activating principle of human endeavor. Personally I find the whole cycle of prayer gesture is more successfully performed when addressed to a personality, but that may be only because faith is strengthened by that practice.

PRAYER PRACTICE

WHEN I began to be interested in prayer practice, and visited women in convents, seeking instruction, I used to hear a great deal about a condition called "Dryness," in which the prayer appears to reach no mark and win no response—I recall a Lady Abbess who said that she won relief from that condition by kneeling on a broomstick, a condition so painful that in order to escape discomfort the spirit takes a great leap upward and away from the immediate state to the heights of spiritual release. But a very little experience convinced me that the state known as Dryness was merely fatigue of the spirit, induced by overapplication, and could best be cured by turning the time ordinarily devoted to it to exercises of pure worship or thanksgiving. I do not recommend any method of overcoming inutil prayer except by rest

and change such as would serve for any extravagant fatigue. I keep no perpetual hour of prayer myself, but when I have an unaccomplished enterprise on hand, on which occasion, I keep on regularly until the purpose is completed.

One of the curiosities of the history and progress of prayer is that though there are frequent references to groups, or even the whole membership of a sacred order, being given over to it, there is no explicit account of a group technique. The only thing of the kind is the occasional mention of a *novena*, a group of nine-day concerted prayers, more often than not for the relief of sickness, or the lifting of an epidemic, or other group misadventure. Special *novenas* have been written applicable to given occasions through the intervention of many particular saints; these are easily accessible through books of common prayer, very often for private use, without any particular timing or concerted effort. But among aboriginal groups these mass prayers are not only carefully worked out, but rehearsed and established with the utmost pains

and ingenuity of detail, word, gesture, costume and accessory. These appear to be, to one who has had frequent occasion for attending them, so successful that, if, in the neighborhood of the Rio Grande a particular occasion arose for presenting one, say for rain, the White people would lend to the Indians participating, any aid they might require, so regularly does the answer come on the presentation of the petition. Also I have known of such singularly successful cures for illness wrought by application of a *novena*, that it is difficult to understand why the use of group prayers for mass afflictions has modernly fallen into disuse. It might, I think, be well used for the sort of group ailments that, at the present, afflict society, such as present themselves under the various titles of economic depression and social disruption. The one indispensable item to the successful working out of group prayer is that you have to believe that there is Mind working within the constitution of the Universe so essentially like Mind that works individually in man that the two can meet and coöperate.

PRAYER AND ITS FULFILLMENT

I DO not profess to understand completely the mechanical interlocking of these separate forces—the individual and group aspects of this unifying mentality—but my experience in working for the appreciation of Folk Arts in the United States clearly bears out the assumption that this is one of the things that Mind—or as I prefer to call it, Indian fashion, Wokonda, cares about, so that you may come into its activities with explicit effect, even though you may not be able to perform all these activities with complete success. Undoubtedly the early Catholic idea back of the organization of many sacred societies, was a true apprehension of the mechanics of spiritual power, and that the making of places and institutions whereby the desire for it could be perpetuated, and prayer continually made for specific effects, had a great deal to do

with the success of many convents, monasteries, and sodalities. In particular, while I was in Italy, I was struck with the success of the Order of St. Francis in sustaining so many institutions for which money is required while maintaining at the same time a condition of extreme poverty. Because of the divided accomplishment which I suffered through the difference between what I wished to do by way of making a living and what I devoutly hoped to do with the living I made, I hit upon the idea of finding out how Francis of Assisi contrived to be at one and the same time so poor and so effective in energizing his time in educational enterprises.

What he did first of all was to think of the state of poverty to which he was dedicated as Holy, and to think of himself in the highest possible relation to it, as being, in fact, married to Holy Poverty. He never thought poorly of himself in that relation, and never sorry for himself at all. His poverty was a personal condition voluntarily assumed, one which was never to be thought of as interdicting

him from the highly organized contributive things he wished to do. In his acceptance of the situation there was great simplicity and directness, humor, poetry and grace of mind. When he wanted money he asked for it and eventually got it. Well, once I had worked out his method, it worked, to a degree, for me. But I had to work it a little further than he left any direction for in his account of what he accomplished. I am not sure that he didn't do exactly what I had to come to; all I mean to say is that if he did he left no account of it. I had to ask with the same directness, without embarrassment, and I had finally to surrender the pleasure of doing myself the thing I wanted done, for the sake merely of getting it done. I had to lie still at last, conceiving the work as it seemed best to me it could be accomplished, to clear in my mind a path to achievement and be content that other people should walk in it. And they came and walked. The Indian Arts have reached a point where they have become fixed in the attention of the government. The Spanish Arts have shaken off the dust of two

generations of neglect and established themselves in public esteem. Folk Art of every description is taking its fully merited place, and by quiet and often secret ways the path of its accomplishment flows into mine, crosses and contacts the way of my thought. And the one assurance I have that there is a direct connection between my thought and these widely diversified activities, is that I know of them before they arrive and can prophesy in advance. Thousands of dollars have actually flowed through my hands in these directions, but also many dollars more have passed in that direction without any realization of personal contact. There was for instance the purchase of Santuario, the last of the little private Spanish chapels, furnished forth with treasures of carved and painted Santos and rare old prints. It had fallen into the hands of the last three or four members of the original family, too poor to keep it up, and suddenly there arose a rumor that it had been sold to a curio dealer who was preparing to break it up for private sale, a loss irreparable to those of us who loved the old

things, reredos, corbels, altar paintings, carved confessional, Saints innumerable. I was lecturing at Yale when Frank Applegate sent me word, and I walked from the post office to my hotel, knowing that I couldn't let it go. I prayed my way all around the campus, and there came to my mind the name of a man whom I knew scarcely at all, but felt myself committed to an appeal. Did he know anybody who would help? Well, perhaps. Yes, a man who would help if he might remain unknown. Surely, yes. So in two days it was arranged, though it took six months to disentangle the sale already made and make the Chapel purchasable. And I don't know yet who paid over to me the six thousand dollars required. In almost the same obscure fashion the money came in for purchasing the pick of the Frank Applegate collection of Santos after Frank died. I wait, alert and ready to be thankful. Is Saint Francis involved? Yes, I think so; in the quality of mind on which such transactions depend. It was an extremely fertile mind, widely contacted, vitally charged. And this is the essential item that

is indispensable to an intellectual approach to prayer, that one learns to make the affective gesture with one's own mind. I don't know to what extent the order of St. Francis has kept in touch with the originating mind, but I know individual Franciscans who can make those necessary contacts. I feel sure that many causes dear to the mass of humanity—such for instance as the avoidance of war and the preservation of peace, might be definitely expedited by such engagements. They would need, first of all, the profound desire which is the initial movement of all prayer, next what I call, since my own mind always goes back to that adventure for its originating activity, the poker complex, the disposition to engage, to coil and array the constituting items of such a solution as is sought, and the production out of the deep self of solvents that are instinctive rather than purely intellectual. They must be not so much reasoned as arrived at, out of activities subconsciously initiated and moved toward. If I had one idea more than another back of the writing of this article, it is to

present the process of prayer as a native, and utterly normal interior activity, designed in the very constitution of the human mind for precisely such solutions. Prayer, to whatever names it has been addressed, and under whatever theology, is a self-originating gesture of the human mind to meet a corresponding gesture working within the constitution of the created universe. It may be that the renewal of this general human habit waits only on a more modern organization of our theocratic ideation, and that God is in fact no more than the activating element in Spirit.

Notice that I stress the item of activating, rather than desirousness. I am often asked by women how I would go about to pray myself a husband, and I have to answer that I have never wanted one badly enough to work that out, but I think it would not be difficult, since mating is so normal an activity; but I would not base it upon desire, you might so easily get a husband that way who might beat you, or commit himself to hard drinking. Altogether I should say that merely to have or to acquire is the

poorest excuse for a life of prayer. I would hardly go so far as to say that you can get anything you want by prayer, but that you can get anything you need for completion and fulfillment; that prayer itself is merely the process of fulfillment, going on by methods that have to be rationally learned and faithfully practiced. And you can probably in no case go any further than the majority of those with whom you are tied in a common knot of activation. Prayer is the whole process of becoming; of complete expressiveness of which we shall never arrive at any given mark. And I shall probably never write a book about it, because I shall never know explicitly where it is going. It ties and unties, patterns and unravels; the most that we can do is to take it at the flow, going with it, leaning upon it.



.III.

PRAYER BEING
ANSWERED

III

PRAYER BEING ANSWERED

IT IS perhaps because of the failure of implicit belief in explicit personalities through whom the answer to prayer is supposed to come that the practice of prayer as a social therapeutic has declined. It is not because by whatever names it has been addressed, under whatever theology, it has not been for me always an identic, forward moving gesture to meet something that works perpetually within the constitution of the created universe, but it is because, chiefly, I have nothing to offer by way of a more explicit naming and description of what it is that *works*, that I know now I will never write a book about it. It is because I have no terminology in which I can communicate about it. Being one of those people who can easily "believe

six impossible things before Breakfast" I can get on admirably with my thinking with whatever terms and symbols there are. I can even bring such intelligence I have to bear upon the subject under the terminology of Father, Son and Holy Ghost; I can make these names fit with what happens to me when I deal with the experiences that sort themselves under these names. But I understand that what most people want is some new light on the nature and structure of Godhead which would make prayer seem a factual reality rather than what it is to me—an experiential reality. I feel it, act it, go through with it, and am convinced that I have experiential results, results that can be catalogued and identified, methods that can be named and discussed. I am aware of these experiential realities going on under the surface of what we call human nature. I have not been afraid to experiment with them, nor to make my experience known. I can take stock of these experiences and measure the degree and extent to which they can be taken into account as life appliances. I am aware

of having come to several conclusions about the use of prayer without experimentation. I feel, for instance, that one can get more readily at the use and meaning of Folk Art by prayer, since it is more easily motivated by a genuine desire for its emergence as activity, than as sophisticated art, which is motivated by a preferential desire for quality. I feel more interest in Catholic prayer than in Protestant prayer because in Catholic prayer I find that one participates in the actual gestures of the prayer process, while in Protestant prayer one tends merely to ape the motions of the prayer leader. And I do not know if these conclusions are factually produced, or if they are merely notions upon which I have happened. They are at least not experiential findings such as that I can lie in my bed during an illness that requires two nurses, as I have recently done, and by keeping true to the actual motions of the prayer process, quietly call together the money needed to keep a valued specimen of Spanish Colonial Art from slipping away out of the control of the Community.

Just how far the capacity for individual participation in kinds of prayer extends, I do not know. My experiments have been restricted to the kinds that interested me, and there are many experiments that I simply haven't tried. But I am convinced that when any such activity is motivated by a genuine individual wish for its emergence in appreciable form, that prayer will always augment the effect, even if it does not always bring the desired result.

It is at this business of making explicit gestures with your mind that most people fail. Most people don't explicitly wish for things; they merely formlessly long for them, "expressing a lack" as the Christian Scientists say. You can't get by with mere yearning, however long entertained. Some of the gestures I have had to make have called for discipline and long continued practice, but I hold them indispensable. In order to have prayer answered you have to want it badly enough to make all the gestures. And until you have made the required gestures, you can't say with any conviction

whether you can get that sort of an answer or not.

And that is why I feel that I shall probably never arrive at any well filled out conclusions about Prayer, and the way in which and the extent to which it gets answered. I have experimented freely with such sorts as have occurred to me, but I have not experimented sufficiently to get all, or even a majority of the answers. With all I am willing to admit about my prayers, I must admit that I have never taken the whole measure of what I pray to. I do not know its one unchanging name. Whatever I, being sincerely moved by the need of it, pray to, it works. I fancy it works better the nearer I get to its actual identity, its true personality. I think if somebody who is seriously studying evolution would come through with a clearer notion of what it is that, at the very core of livingness, evolves, I might know what to call what I pray to. Whatever it is, it has an infinite capacity for evolutionary change. It is tied up with all our processes of being and becoming. But I don't know yet what it is.

Can prayer be answered?

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